

CHAPTER 2: WHAT FEMINISM PROMISED — AND WHAT IT DELIVERED

The Promise of Freedom

Feminism promised women freedom from limitation.

It promised choice, opportunity, and autonomy. It promised liberation from injustice and protection from exploitation. In many ways, especially in its earliest expressions, these promises addressed real and necessary concerns. Women deserved legal protections. They deserved access to education. They deserved safety, dignity, and the ability to participate fully in society.

These things mattered—and they still matter.

But over time, the promise of freedom quietly shifted. What began as protection slowly became prescription. Feminism moved from defending women's rights to redefining womanhood itself. Instead of expanding the range of honorable choices, it began narrowing them. Instead of honoring difference, it pursued sameness. Instead of affirming women's unique strengths, it subtly suggested those strengths were liabilities to overcome.

Freedom was no longer simply about opportunity.

It became about identity.

When Choice Became Expectation

At the heart of modern feminism is the language of choice. Women are told they can choose any path—career, lifestyle, relationship structure, or role—and that all choices are equally empowering.

But lived experience tells a more complicated story.

While women technically may choose many paths, not all choices are celebrated. Some are quietly discouraged, minimized, or mocked. Women who prioritize career ambition are praised. Women who delay marriage are affirmed. Women who remain child-free are often applauded for independence.

But women who choose marriage, motherhood, and homemaking as their primary focus are frequently treated as though they have settled for less.

Choice, in practice, became conditional.

You may choose anything—
as long as you don't choose home.

The Subtle Devaluing of Motherhood

One of the most significant shifts feminism produced was the reframing of motherhood.

What was once recognized as essential, formative, and socially vital was increasingly portrayed as restrictive. Pregnancy became something to delay or fear. Child-rearing was described as an interruption to personal progress. Staying home with children was framed as wasted potential.

Women learned to speak of motherhood defensively:
“I’m just a mom.”
“I’ll go back to work when the kids are older.”
“I didn’t want to lose myself.”

The implication was clear: to center one’s life around children was to diminish one’s worth.

Yet Scripture never presents motherhood as a detour from purpose. It presents it as purpose itself—work that shapes lives, families, and generations. The cultural devaluing of motherhood did not free women from limitation; it taught them to doubt the eternal significance of the very role that once grounded societies.

Marriage Recast as Suspicion

Alongside motherhood, marriage also underwent a cultural reframing.

Marriage, once understood as partnership, protection, and shared responsibility, was increasingly portrayed as optional at best and oppressive at worst. Women were encouraged to view marriage with suspicion—to guard themselves, maintain independence, and prepare for its potential failure.

Rather than being presented as a covenant rooted in mutual sacrifice, marriage became a contract to negotiate. Rather than a source of stability, it was framed as a risk to manage.

Men, once seen as partners and providers, were increasingly cast as competitors or threats. Dependence—once understood as interdependence—was equated with vulnerability, and vulnerability was equated with danger.

Yet Scripture never portrays marriage as a trap. It portrays it as a design meant to reflect God’s covenantal love—ordered, sacrificial, and life-giving when rightly lived.

The Myth of “Having It All”

Perhaps no phrase better captures modern feminist pressure than the promise that women can “have it all.”

Career success.

Family life.

Personal fulfillment.

Financial independence.

Romantic satisfaction.

Self-actualization.

The idea sounds empowering—until the weight of it settles in.

Women were told they could do everything, but they were rarely told they would be expected to do everything. Professional excellence did not replace domestic responsibility; it was added to it. Emotional labor did not decrease; it intensified. Support structures did not expand; they disappeared.

Many women discovered that “having it all” often meant doing it all—alone.

The result was not liberation, but exhaustion.

When Equality Meant Erasing Difference

One of the most damaging ideas feminism introduced was the notion that equality required sameness.

Instead of affirming that men and women are equal in value yet different in design, feminism often pursued equality through imitation. Success was measured by how closely women could mirror male patterns of work, leadership, and ambition.

Feminine instincts—nurture, sensitivity, relational awareness—were treated as obstacles rather than assets. Women were encouraged to suppress softness, harden emotions, and detach from dependence in order to compete.

Yet Scripture never equates equality with sameness.

God’s design honors difference without diminishing worth. The body needs many parts, each functioning uniquely. When difference is erased, harmony is lost. When women are pressured to live as though they were designed like men, confusion follows.

The Pressure to Prove Worth

As feminism evolved, the message women received subtly shifted.

It was no longer simply:

“You have value.”

It became:

“You must demonstrate your value.”

Worth became tied to productivity, visibility, income, and influence. Women learned to measure themselves by output rather than faithfulness. Identity became something to earn rather than receive.

This pressure did not produce confidence. It produced anxiety.

Women found themselves constantly evaluating:

Am I doing enough?

Am I achieving enough?

Am I falling behind?

Am I wasting my potential?

Scripture offers a radically different foundation. In Christ, worth is not achieved—it is given. Calling flows from identity, not performance. When women are taught they must prove themselves, rest becomes impossible.

The Cost to Women’s Souls

The long-term cost of these cultural shifts is not merely social—it is spiritual.

Many women feel disconnected from themselves, from their families, and from God. They sense that something essential has been lost, yet they struggle to name it. They feel guilty for wanting a simpler life. Ashamed for desiring dependence. Conflicted about longing for home.

They have been taught that fulfillment lies in autonomy, yet their hearts crave belonging. They have been told that independence equals strength, yet they long for partnership and protection.

This internal conflict is not accidental. It is the result of living between two stories—one told by culture, and one told by God.

What Scripture Never Promised

Scripture never promised women limitless autonomy.

It promised purpose.
It promised order.
It promised fruitfulness.
It promised generational impact.
It promised peace rooted in obedience.
It promised identity grounded in relationship—with God and with others.

Biblical freedom is not the absence of limits. It is the presence of alignment. Just as a river finds power within its banks, women flourish most fully within God's design.

Freedom without form leads to fragmentation.
Freedom with purpose leads to peace.

Reframing the Conversation

Unchained Womanhood does not deny that women have faced injustice. It does not advocate passivity or silence. It does not shame women whose lives look different than the ideal.

But it does challenge the assumption that feminism delivered what it promised.

It invites women to ask an honest question:

If women are more anxious, more exhausted, and more disconnected than ever—is it possible that something essential was lost in the pursuit of liberation?

Is it possible that what was framed as freedom actually removed women from the very structures that once supported them?

A Choice Reclaimed

This chapter is not a call to nostalgia. It is a call to discernment.

Women do not need fewer choices. They need honest permission to choose differently. They need affirmation that marriage, motherhood, homemaking, and ordered lives are not inferior paths—but sacred ones.

They need reassurance that wanting home does not mean lacking ambition. That desiring family does not mean fearing independence. That embracing dependence within God's design does not mean weakness.

Choice was never meant to isolate women from their calling. It was meant to serve it.

Unchained Womanhood invites women to reclaim the freedom feminism could not give—the freedom to live in alignment with God’s design, without apology.